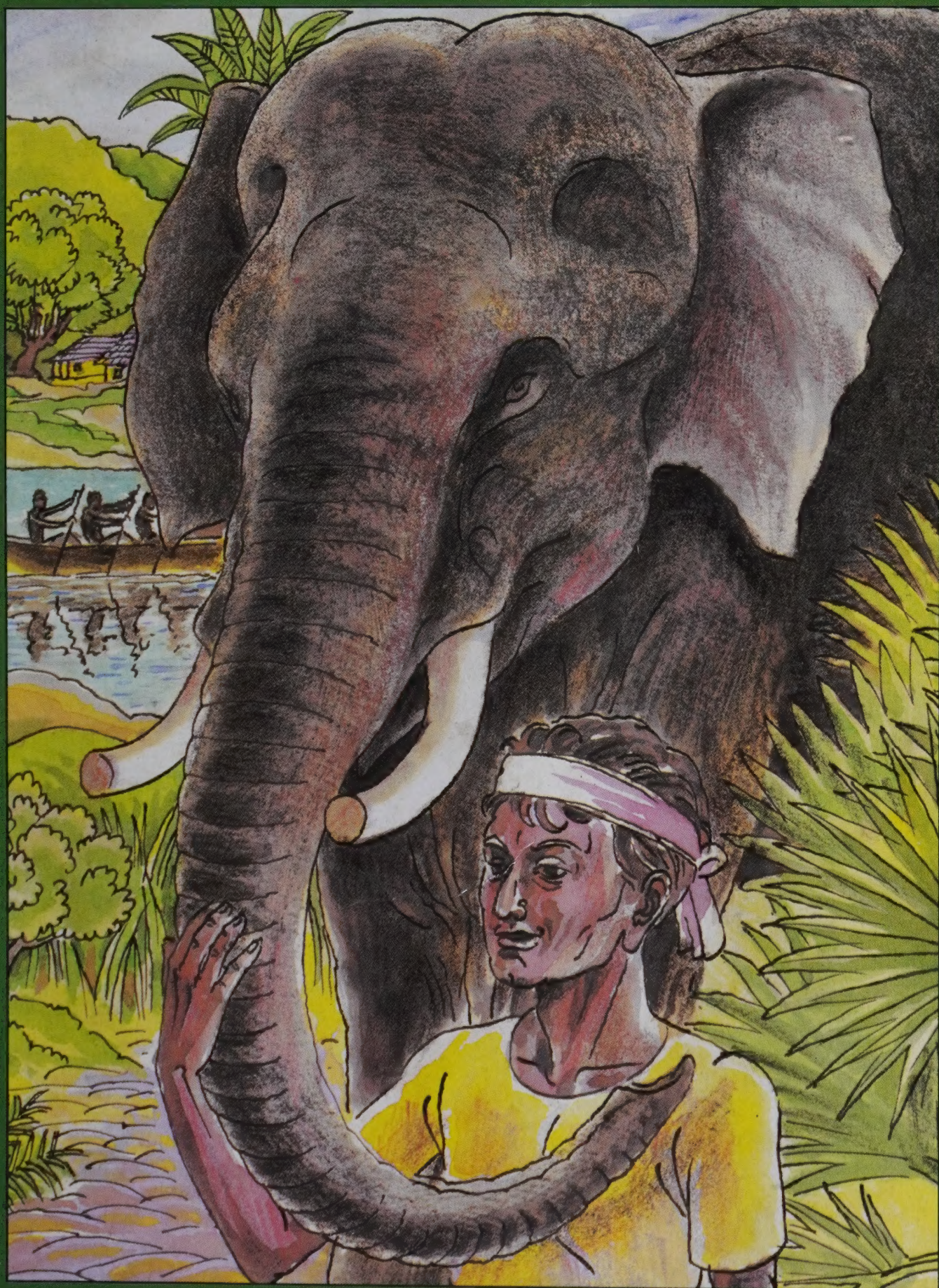


Orient Longman

EASY

READING

An Elephant's Story



Kiliroor Radhakrishnan

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ORIENT LONGMAN EASY READERS

LEVEL 4

An Elephant's Story

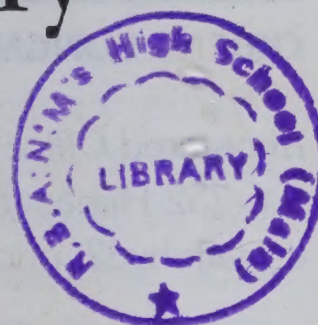
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An Elephant's Story

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A word about readers and reading

Childhood is a time of enchantment as well as innocence. The child's eye transforms even mundane incidents and objects into the contours of a magical landscape; and perhaps the most potent magic of all is created by the miracle of *reading*. Once the child has discovered the intoxication of reading, life cannot remain the same; in fact, this may be the only relic of one's lost childhood that the adult is able to retain to the end, for it allows constant renewal.

It is sad that today media threaten one of the great comforts and privileges of a civilised society—the joy of reading a book. For nothing, no advance in technology, can quite replace the printed book. The child's imagination provides the script, helped by a little 'cueing' from an understanding writer, for the most fantastic as well as moving tales ever created. It is precisely because the book enables the child to unlock the treasure-chest of her or his own imagination that it scores so easily over a predominantly visual medium such as television.

The value of *extensive reading*, or *reading for pleasure*, has been widely recognised by language teachers, particularly teachers of English. It has been proved that children who come from homes where habits of reading are encouraged, develop faster, cognitively as well as linguistically, than children from homes where little reading is done. In fact, in a situation such as ours, where English is only a second language, with restricted use within the community, it is *reading* that can contribute most to successful language learning. Of the many millions of Indian children who spend painful years at school trying to master this language, relatively few succeed; and it can be demonstrated that those who do are the ones who have taught themselves to *read*—independently and widely, and with understanding and pleasure.

It may be said that, on the whole, the teaching of English does not adequately support or foster habits of extensive reading. Very many children read only the prescribed 'reader'. While the textbook, properly used, can be instrumental in the development of many essential *skills* of reading, there are other important skills which can be developed only through extensive (rather than intensive) reading, such as the skill of reading fast in order to acquire an overall understanding of a text. The language learner needs exposure to a wider variety of text types than can be provided

through a single prescribed 'reader'. It is also important that learners should be trained to do *sustained* reading, which means reading through a *full-length* book (no matter how short) rather than a truncated excerpt.

The purpose in introducing extensive reading is to encourage children to read *widely* and *independently*, without having to depend on the teacher's help. Ideally, we should expect a child to read at least four to six books a year. The secret of success in reading is to develop the confidence that the learner *can* read independently. It is possible, however, that many children may not be able to or be willing at first to undertake the effort required and will require guidance by teachers. However, help should be offered, if at all, only as a form of *transition*, with the aim of gradually reducing the learner's dependence on the teacher.

In many schools in our country as well as abroad, every classroom has a *reading corner*, where selected children's books are attractively displayed. Several times a week, there is a *reading hour*, when children are free to pick up any book they like and read without interference. Some of the acronyms created for such activities are USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading) and DEAR (Drop Everything and Read). The benefits of such activities, which allow children to decide what they should be doing during a particular period, go beyond the development of reading skills.

This series, which has already gained wide acceptance over the years, is being re-issued in a more attractive format. Old favourites are being retained, but the range of titles is to be expanded to suit current interests and tastes. Texts have been carefully reviewed; it is intended that while these 'abridgments' should be faithful in spirit to the originals, children should be exposed to writing that is contemporary in style and idiom.

We hope that teachers, learners and their parents will find the new books even more useful and attractive than the ones they replace. The editors and publisher will be grateful for comments and suggestions. Meanwhile, to all young readers: *Happy Reading!*

Bikram K. Das

Series Editor

About the series

The *Orient Longman Easy Readers* aim to help children discover the joy of reading without feeling the constraints of a limited vocabulary. It is an encouraging experience for the child to be able to read what Michael West has called '...an enthralling approximation of the original'. The series tries to open up to the readers the world of old classics as well as modern writings, all within their grasp, as the language is simple and controlled.

The books are carefully graded into seven levels so that students progress gradually through successive grades with increasing ranges of vocabulary. There are seven levels in all beginning with 250–300 headwords in the first level to 3500–5000 headwords in level seven. In addition to the basic core vocabulary there are topic words, which along with difficult basic words are glossed on the pages in which they occur. The seven levels are meant for the age groups five to seven years at level one, and go up to twelve to fifteen years at level seven. Apart from lexical control, the books also use a structural grading system that is familiar to the readers. Even within each level, they are linguistically graded.

Although the books are simplified versions of original literary works, every effort has been made to preserve the author's individuality of style and opinion. The series hopes to bring to the readers a well-written story which will motivate them to go on reading and give them an opportunity to increase language awareness so that they will eventually be able to read and respond to the stylistics of unedited texts.

About the book

An Elephant's Story celebrates the wonderful bond that can develop between an animal and its keeper. The story opens dramatically as readers are amazed to find the elephant Kannan keeping vigil outside the hospital where his mahout, Nandan, has been admitted. In 'flashback' we are told of how Nandan, as a boy, was fascinated by elephants and ran away from home to become a mahout. Many years later he returns home as a full-fledged mahout and is given charge of the temple elephant, Kannan. Nandan devotes himself to looking after Kannan and soon the two become inseparable. One day, Kannan goes into '*musth*' and rampages through the village. It is the final test for Nandan as a mahout—will he be able to bring Kannan back in control? A sensitive tale of a loving and faithful animal friend, *An Elephant's Story* brings home to its readers, yet again, the need to treat other living creatures with love and kindness.

Kiliroor Radhakrishnan was born in 1944 at Kiliroor, a village near Kottayam, Kerala. A prolific writer since the 1960s, he has published innumerable short stories and articles, in addition to six novels and more than twenty-five titles for children. Till 2002 he was the General Manager of D. C. Books, Kottayam and is now a publication consultant with Poorna Publications, Calicut. He has received several awards at the state and national levels and some of his stories have been translated into Tamil, Telegu, Kannada and Hindi. This book *Aanakkatha* (literally 'An Elephant's Story') has won the NCERT national award as well as the Kerala government's award for children's literature.

Foreword

The elephant is one of the largest animals in the world. Is that the only reason why humans, particularly children, have a special regard for the elephant? Why is it that compared to other animals, the elephant grips the imagination of children?

It is different from other animals, with its huge size, the beauty of its build, its physical strength, longevity, innocence, sense of gratitude and, more than anything else, its remarkable memory. These attributes, no doubt, have endeared the elephant to children.

But what have people done to the elephant? For purely, selfish motives, they have made the animal their slave, uprooting it from its natural habitat. The elephant's home is the jungle, and it is in the jungle where it should live, and not in cities or towns, villages or other places of human habitation. And after domesticating the elephant, do people treat it with love? No.

There are many similarities between human beings and elephants. A highly intelligent creature, the elephant is one animal that easily and readily responds to love and affection. It even allows little children to take liberties with it. In contrast, what do people do? They put the elephant to hard labour; they do not give it enough food and often make it starve; they even torture the animal, without showing any kindness or sympathy. No wonder, then, that the elephant sometimes considers man as the epitome of cruelty and ingratitude. Left to itself, the elephant, likes to move with its herd, enjoying the freedom to eat and drink as it pleases and play with others of its kind. In utter disregard of all this, the elephant is chained, made to work, and often threatened with hook and spike or denied food and drink till the work is completed. People are thus committing a heartless crime.

The elephant, however, is no simpleton. It remembers each and every cruel act—sometimes for years together—and waits for an opportunity to retaliate. It is human cruelty that makes the elephant vengeful.

But if you show love and kindness to the elephant, it will befriend you like any other domesticated animal. This truth is revealed in *An Elephant's Story*. The hero Nandan is a little boy who loves the elephant more than any other creature. For that matter, Nandan is not an imaginary character; he does exist somewhere in Kerala, of

course, now a grown-up. It is not uncommon to see in Kerala, pictures of young boys and girls leading huge elephants.

This book makes just one request to children—they must love elephants. They must rise against cruelty towards them. In fact, not only elephants, but all other animals. They deserve love and kindness from us. Human beings cannot claim to be superior for all living creatures have an equal claim to this earth. When we forget this, and go about enslaving everything else, we lose such humane values as love, affection and kindness.

Let my story help children dream of a morrow where humanity co-exists harmoniously with other living beings.

18 February 2004

Kiliroor Radhakrishnan

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This is what happened. A few days ago, I went to the district hospital, to meet a friend who was ill.

As soon as I went in through the gates, I saw an elephant keeping guard outside the emergency ward. A number of people had crowded around him. Looking at him once more, I was surprised to find that I knew him. It was Kannan, the temple elephant.

But where was his mahout Nandan? I had never seen one without the other. I pushed my way in through the crowd and went into the hospital where I met a doctor I knew well. He told me that Nandan had been admitted to hospital because he had had a sudden heart attack. "Luckily he is out of danger now, but he will have to stay here for at least another week," he said. I was relieved.

Then I learnt that Kannan had followed his mahout into the hospital compound, and was now refusing to leave. The assistant mahout, Prabhakaran had tried his best to take him away, but the elephant simply wouldn't move! I was not really surprised, for I knew that the bond between Kannan and Nandan was particularly strong.

I went up to the elephant. Prabhakaran was patting him and talking to him gently, but Kannan stood absolutely still like a statue, frozen by grief.

It was clear that he knew that something very serious had happened to Nandan.

I called out softly to Prabhakaran and asked him what had happened to Nandan.

“He seemed perfectly well in the morning,” Prabhakaran replied. “He was giving Kannan a bath in the river when he complained of a severe pain in the chest. He scrambled out of the water and fell down unconscious. I called for help, and we brought him to hospital.”

“And what about Kannan?” I asked.

“Well, he is a problem now as you can see,” Prabhakaran explained. “He saw them taking Nandan away in a car, and immediately ran after them. I chased him all the way and found that he had reached the hospital.”

“The doctors are upset about him, Prabhakaran. They want the elephant taken away from the hospital compound.”

“I know, but how can I make him understand that? Nandan never used a stick or steel goad on him even during his training. How can I use them now?”

“Try to lead him away gently,” I suggested.

Prabhakaran tried. He patted Kannan on the trunk and said, "Nandan is fine now. Let's go home. He will follow us soon."

Kannan looked sternly at Prabhakaran and blinked.

"Do you understand him, sir?" Prabhakaran wrung his hands helplessly. "He does not intend to move. What shall I do now?"

"Lead him into the shade of the trees for the time being," I said. "You may be able to take him away later."

Prabhakaran coaxed and shoved and finally managed to move Kannan to the foot of a large tree near the boundary wall.

Nandan was discharged seven days later. All this while, Kannan waited for him under the tree. I went to the hospital two or three times to ask about Nandan and look up Kannan. The elephant seemed sad and worried, and ate nothing all week.

In the beginning the hospital people were upset by the presence of the elephant. They complained to the collector and the police, demanding that he be

coaxed: asked somebody to do something in a kind and gentle way

shoved: pushed

collector: a government official in charge of an entire district

taken away, but nobody could budge him. Soon they got used to him and stopped bothering.

When Nandan became strong enough to walk a little, he made his way slowly to Kannan. The elephant's eyes lit up with joy. He waved his trunk, fanned his large ears and took a few dancing steps.

"I'm all right Kanna," Nandan said, patting him. "Don't worry. We can go home now." Then he held out a bunch of bananas, which the elephant gobbled up happily.

The onlookers, who included the doctors and nurses, were amazed. "Just look at that!" they exclaimed. "These two are more like brothers than elephant and mahout."





The Young Mahout

Shall I then tell you the story of Nandan and Kannan now?

To begin with, Nandan is about forty years old, and so am I. We were neighbours and classmates at school, but Nandan gave up his studies early—when he was in class four or five. His mother begged him to continue but he would not listen to her.

“I don’t need to study,” he always said. “When I grow up I’ll become a mahout.” In the end his mother gave up in disgust.

Nandan had always been fond of elephants. Whenever he saw elephants in a circus or at a fair, he spent all his time staring at them. He would watch them for hours, sometimes even forgetting to eat. We teased him about this, though of course we could also understand him, for we loved elephants too. Is there any child who isn’t fascinated by them?

However, Nandan was more interested in them than the rest of us, and finally he did become a mahout. But it did not happen overnight. After he left school, he spent all his time at the local temple, watching the elephants that came there for the festivals.

The mahouts noticed his interest, and one of them finally asked, "Hey boy! Why are you always following our elephants?"

Nandan didn't reply. He only laughed and the mahouts forgot about him, because many boys hung around the elephants anyway. Some of them begged for a hair plucked from the tail, but Nandan did not like this at all.

"Leave the poor animal alone," he always said. "He may be very big, but pulling a hair from his tail will hurt him." The children laughed at the idea of such a little thing bothering such a big animal but Nandan just wouldn't allow it.

The mahouts got quite used to Nandan for he was always there. And he made himself useful by running errands for them. He would fetch their *beedis* and *paan* from the market or drag bundles of palm leaves close to the elephants so that the animals could feed easily. Nandan was very

the festival at the temple on the hilltop,” one of my friends said.

He was right. People had been collecting donations for the festival and we had been looking forward to it for a long time. The elephant came closer and we moved over to the side of the road.

Suddenly a voice called out, “Kutta, Gopalakrishna, Shiva, Mathaicha! Have you forgotten me?”

We could not believe our eyes. It was Nandan, walking along confidently with the elephant, gently stroking its hind leg. The chief mahout was riding the elephant. The second mahout was leading the animal along by its tusk. Nandan followed behind.

“So Nandan, have you become a mahout now?” I asked very respectfully.

“Not yet, but I will be one someday soon,” said Nandan proudly.

He walked across to us. He had a *lungi* wrapped over his trousers; a towel hung over his shoulder. He looked every inch a mahout.

We exchanged news—it was his first visit home after he had run away. He told us how he had been

with the elephant to many fairs and festivals, and had also watched it working in the timber yards.

"I'll tell you all about my adventures," he said. "But let me meet my mother first." We knew he had had many interesting experiences and we were all a bit jealous of him.



We were very angry with him but the next day our anger had faded and we sought him out again.

The festival ended, and Nandan prepared to leave with his elephant. This time his mother did not cry. She was not happy with the work he was doing, but at least he was well and happy. She tried to persuade him to change his job for a less dangerous one. "A mahout is always in danger," she said, but Nandan just laughed off her worries because elephants filled his dreams. He could not live without them.

Years passed. Nandan came back to the village many times but I was busy and could not always meet him. That year too, I was told that Nandan and his elephant had come for the festival, but I was studying hard and didn't even get time to visit the temple.

Late one night, on my way home, I passed the *anjili* tree to which the elephant was chained every night. I heard someone speaking very softly. I went closer and recognised Nandan's voice. With whom was he talking at this late hour? I peered into the shadows. The elephant had curled his trunk up into something like a seat. Nandan was sitting on it and stroking the animal. A chill ran down my spine.

anjili: a tree found in Kerala, like the jackfruit tree, but with smaller fruits.

Nandan was telling his elephant lovingly, "Tomorrow we move to the west. There is a palm tree in one of the houses we will pass by. I'll cut some palm leaves down for you to eat—you like them don't you? Ah—but remember one thing! You are not to play dirty tricks on me when I give you a bath, or I'll beat you." Nandan spoke as if he were talking to a child.

"Nanda!" I shouted in fear.

"Gopalakrishnan?" Nandan said trying to see me in the darkness. "Where are you? All of you seem to have become busy college students and won't have anything to do with a mahout like me any more!"

"We'll talk about that later. What a dangerous thing you are doing! What if the elephant throws you up in the air!"

Nandan burst out laughing. "Did you hear that?" he said to the elephant. "Gopalakrishnan thinks you will start playing ball with me. He doesn't know anything about us, does he?"

I tried to make Nandan come away with me, but he remained seated on the elephant's trunk. I tossed restlessly in bed all night, fearing that the elephant would kill Nandan. But in the morning I

saw the two of them walking around as usual and felt relieved.

After the festival, Nandan and his elephant left. One evening, many months later, I heard someone crying loudly. The noise came from Nandan's mother's house. I rushed outside, and so did the other neighbours.

"What's the matter?" we all asked.

"My son!" she wailed. "An elephant has gored him and he is in hospital. What will happen to him now?"

I spotted a stranger standing there quietly. He introduced himself to me. "I am Mathew," he said. "I work in a timber mill at Kottarakara. My master sent me to tell Nandan's family about the accident."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Nandan had taken his elephant to log wood. Another elephant, which was a little mischievous, began to trouble Nandan's animal, so he walked up to it angrily to scold it. The beast charged. Nandan managed to step aside, but the tip of the tusk left a deep cut in his thigh. It is not serious, but he may be in hospital for two weeks."

gored: pierced with a horn or tusk

timber mill: a factory where logs of wood are cut and sized for carpentry, building, etc.

“Well, thank God for that!” I said.

“But Nandan’s mother just refuses to believe me,” Mathew said.

“Don’t worry. Let me talk to her.” I replied.

I explained it all once more and she felt much less worried; but she insisted on going with Mathew to Kottarakara to see her son.

Nandan looked cheerful and happy when she met him. “It’s just a small wound, Mother,” he said, showing it to her with a smile.

“Thank God! You’ve been saved from certain death,” she said. “But Nandan, you must come home with me now. I won’t let you be a mahout. It’s far too dangerous. Promise me you’ll give up this job.”

“Amma, I promise,” Nandan smiled, but it was clear to everyone present that he didn’t mean to keep his word. How could he ever keep away from elephants?



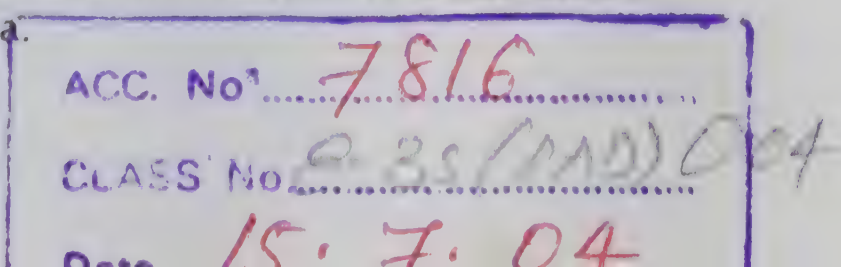
Nandan and the elephant came to know each other. Nandan was beside himself with joy.

He named the elephant Kannan and tied a brass bell on a red string round his neck. It chimed musically when he walked. Kannan did not understand Nandan's language, Malayalam, as he came from Bihar. This could have become a problem between the animal and his mahout, but a bond of affection soon developed between them and helped them communicate with each other.

Every morning, when Nandan ran his hand gently over Kannan and told him, "Come on Kanna! Let's go for a bath," the elephant immediately followed Nandan to the river, walked into the water and lay down. Nandan then scrubbed him clean with a coconut husk.

After the bath the two of them always headed for Nambiar's house where huge balls of cooked rice were kept ready for them. Nandan offered them to Kannan one by one and he gobbled them up happily. Then the elephant walked over to where Nambiar was waiting for him, holding out a large piece of jaggery and a bunch of bananas. Chewing on it happily like a child eating toffee, he would walk off.

Jaggery: a kind of sugar that is dark brown in colour. It is also called *n gur* in some parts of India.



Kannan was a quick learner. Nandan didn't have to say much to him. The elephant seemed to understand everything. In the beginning, Nandan kept Kannan's legs chained up for safety, but once he settled down, all the chains were removed. Nandan also gave up the tools that mahouts keep to control their charges—the stout stick, the goad and the spear.

As time passed, Nandan and Kannan became very close to each other. The mahout spent most of his time with the elephant. If he went away even for a short time, Kannan cried like a child. When Nandan hurried back to him, Kannan wrapped his trunk around him and hugged him warmly. Nandan would then stroke him and say, "Why do you cry, Kanna? Don't be afraid. I will never leave you."

Except during the monsoons, Nandan stayed with Kannan at night too. Soon it became a familiar sight—the elephant lying down with his legs sprawled out, his trunk tucked into his mouth, looking like a great baby happily sucking his thumb. Nandan would watch him for a while and then lie down, resting his head on the elephant's foreleg. Then he talked to Kannan till both of them fell asleep.

Before long, Kannan became the favourite of the whole village. After his morning meal at Nambiar's place he walked through the village, with Nandan riding him or walking alongside, holding his tusk. At every house, both grown-ups and children waited eagerly for him. They offered him delicious things to eat—grated coconut, jaggery, bananas and sugarcane. He reached out with his trunk, to pick up and eat the food.

Kannan loved children and put up with them patiently even if their tricks hurt him. Often he curled up his trunk and danced merrily for them, while they clapped their hands and cheered. Sometimes they threw the thick stem of a plantain tree in front of him, saying, "Come on Kanna, gore it to death."

Kannan obliged by driving his tusks into the stem, lifting it up and trumpeting loudly, pretending to be victorious. He would look very fierce, but the children were not afraid of him for they knew he was only play-acting.

But Nandan did not like such games and wouldn't allow them when he was around. "Kannan is a gentle elephant and must not be violent even in fun," he'd say.



A Sad Loss

A number of elephants took part in the processions during temple festivals in the area, but Kannan always led them, carrying the main idol on his back. This was because he was the most graceful and disciplined of them all. He didn't become restless or bump into the others. Nor did he chew palm leaves as he walked along, as the other elephants did.

He loved festivals and enjoyed the music. In fact, he became so involved in it all that he wouldn't even eat during the procession. And he wasn't afraid when the fireworks went off with deafening sounds and flashes of light. That is why people loved him.

Nandan took great care of Kannan. They travelled long distances from festival to festival, but Nandan made sure that they never did so in the heat of the day. He believed that an elephant's feet are

very tender; and walking on hot tarred roads would cause Kannan's feet to blister.

So they chose to travel by night. Nandan held a lighted lantern to show the way. The bell around Kannan's neck rang with every step he took, warning those who came from the opposite direction. To keep himself awake, Nandan told Kannan stories. The elephant listened to him as he swung along merrily, chuckling now and then, in enjoyment.

Once the festival season ended, Kannan had a break from work. Other elephants were taken off to log and haul wood at this time. But Kannan was never made to do this, because both Nandan and Nambiar thought he should have some fun for a change.

So Kannan took time off and helped the people of the village. If someone had an old coconut tree that had to be uprooted, Kannan did it. If the branch of a mango tree had to be cut, Kannan would snap it off. He was paid for his labour in lumps of *jaggery* and bunches of bananas.

So the days passed happily for Nandan and Kannan, until one day, Nandan's mother died. Nandan had no other family except her. Both Nandan and Kannan were heart-broken.

blister: get small swellings under the skin

chuckling: laughing quietly

haul: pull something with difficulty



Nandan's mother had not wanted her son to continue as a mahout after his accident. But when she saw Kannan, she changed her mind and began to treat him as if he was another son.

Everyday, when Nandan came home for lunch, his mother laid out a banana leaf for him and served him rice and curries. Kannan, standing some distance away, would take a few steps towards them. His admirers in the village always gave him plenty to eat but he wanted his share from Nandan's mother too.

Nandan would hold out a ball of rice mixed with *sambar*, which Kannan swallowed quickly. After that, Nandan's mother brought out a special dish of salted rice, mixed with turmeric and onions to protect Kannan from worms. Kannan, very excited by now, curled up his trunk, moved his ears and shifted his legs, as if to say, "Amma, feed me quickly. I haven't had anything to eat all day."

"Liar!" Nandan would laugh. "His stomach is quite full, Amma."

Kannan fanned his ears, as if to say, "No food is as tasty as what you give me."

The old woman fed him with her own hands. Kannan would gobble up the food eagerly. When

sambar: a dish made of pulses, vegetables, tamarind and other spices

he finished eating, she kissed him on his trunk. That kiss became very important to Kannan.

One day, she was in a hurry. She fed Kannan as usual, but forgot to kiss him. Picking up the empty pot, she turned to go back into the house. Suddenly Kannan stretched out his trunk and stopped her.

The old lady was frightened. After all, Kannan was a very big elephant. But she soon realised that he was only reminding her to kiss him. She hugged his trunk and kissed him many times. Kannan's eyes shone with joy.

"You are my son too, Kanna," Nandan's mother said, her own eyes filling with tears.

This affectionate woman was now lying dead, and Kannan could sense the loss. Standing close to the verandah where her body lay, he put out his trunk and ran it gently over her body. All the people there started crying at the sight.

Nandan and Kannan did not eat anything for two days. The elephant seemed to miss her even more than Nandan did. On the third day, after much coaxing and prodding, Nandan managed to lead Kannan down to the river. Kannan picked his way carefully, taking very small steps. For once the bell round his neck did not ring. Kannan and Nandan mourned her in silence.

Kannan continued to play with his palm leaf, tearing it into bits, slapping it against his leg. Suddenly he heard a hiss and looked up. He saw a cobra with its hood raised, near the sleeping Nandan. Kannan froze, but only for a moment. Then he swung into action. Picking up a palm leaf, he hurled it at the snake. Fortunately, his aim was perfect and he hit the snake on the head. It was seriously hurt, and lay dying.

The stalk of the palm leaf had hit Nandan too. He woke up with a start and turned angrily towards Kannan. Scolding him, he turned over to go back to sleep, when he saw the dying cobra. Picking it up at the end of a stick, he threw it far away. Then, he realised what had happened and said gently to Kannan, "You have saved my life, Kanna."

Kannan had been angry because Nandan scolded him, but now all was forgiven. He wound his trunk lovingly around his mahout, and they sat up together all night. Nandan was now sure that though Kannan was an elephant, he was really like his own brother.

Another incident took place a few days later. About eight kilometers away from the village, there was a famous old Siva temple, to which a wealthy man had presented an elephant called

Sivankutty. This elephant was as intelligent as Kannan, but he was more mischievous, and unfortunately, his mahouts were very cruel. Even when he made small mistakes, they punished him by driving the pointed end of the spear under his nails, or by pushing a steel goad into his ear, till he cried out in pain. The mahouts insisted that this was the only way to train and tame an elephant.

One day when Nandan was returning to the village after a festival, he met Raman, Sivankutty's chief mahout. Raman complained to Nandan that Sivankutty was very naughty.

"Brother," Nandan said gently. "Sivan is very young, and young elephants are always a little naughty. Look at Kannan. He is twenty-eight but he often behaves like a child."

Kannan seemed to understand that they were talking about him. He stamped on the ground once or twice and trumpeted loudly in protest. Why was Nandan complaining about him to strangers?

"No, no!" said Raman. "Sivan is not at all like Kannan. He is disobedient and bad-tempered. He hates both my assistant and me."

"Well," Nandan said, "if you always use sticks and spears and steel goads on him, how do you expect

Sivankutty to like you? If you treat him with love he will respond.

“Love?” said Raman. “Treat Sivankutty with love? Don’t be silly. This beast deserves a good beating. I will beat him, and prick him with the goad and prod him till he learns that I am his master.”

Nandan tried again to persuade Raman to be gentle with Sivankutty. Then he and Kannan continued on their way.

Nandan did not read newspapers, so it was months before he heard the tragic news. Someone in a teashop told him that Sivankutty was dead. He had been beaten to death by his cruel mahouts.

Nandan, sunk in sadness, thought about the life of an elephant. First, as a baby elephant, Sivankutty, must have run about happily in the forest. Fate led him to a covered pit, into which he fell. He was then pulled out by trained elephants. At first he would have been happy to meet others of his kind, but soon he was separated from them and locked up in a small cage where he could not even turn around. Other elephants and their mahouts would have then trained him, beating

covered pit: a hole in the ground covered with grass and branches. It is made to trap animals.

and prodding him with spikes till he screamed and trumpeted in pain and fear.

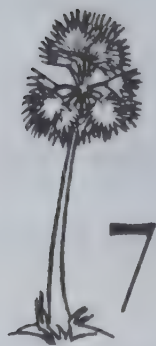
Finally he was handed over to a group of cruel mahouts who tortured him to death.

Thinking of Sivankutty's fate, Nandan felt very frightened. "Oh God! What will I do if such a thing happens to Kannan?" he thought. He stayed close to Kannan all day now, afraid that someone might try to take him away, or kill him.



spikes: pointed sticks

trumpeted: made a loud blaring noise like that of a trumpet



The Runaway

Usually there are three or four mahouts to look after an elephant. But Kannan had only one—Nandan. Thinking that there would be no one to look after the elephant if he fell ill, Nandan chose an assistant called Prabhakaran.

Prabhakaran was also kind and affectionate, and got along well with Kannan. But he was a little jealous when he saw how deep Kannan's love for Nandan was. He wished he could get the same kind of affection. But Kannan, though he liked Prabhakaran well enough, did not consider him Nandan's equal. So it was his front foot that he would hold out for Nandan to step on and climb onto his back; but Prabhakaran had to use the elephant's hind leg to climb up!

However, things soon fell into place. Everything went well, till one day, Nandan noticed a change in Kannan. Every elephant goes into '*musth*' at

some time or the other. Then he gets over-excited and runs wild, obeying no one. At such times he really doesn't know what he is doing. Nandan realised this was what was happening to Kannan.

Prabhakaran and he knew they had to chain him up so that the elephant didn't run off into the village, destroying things and frightening people. After discussing the matter, they thought it would probably take Kannan a week or more to become really uncontrollable and difficult. So they decided to wait a few days more before chaining him up.

It turned out that they had made a big mistake. That very night, Kannan went wild and forgot himself completely. He even felt like attacking Nandan and Prabhakaran, but he was held back by the deep love he had for them.

He ran away from them and made his way towards the village. At first he only wanted to be free to roam around, but soon he found he couldn't control himself. He started to destroy things—plantain trees, tapioca plants, hedges and boundary walls.

At dawn Nandan awoke and found Kannan missing. "Prabhakara! We've made a big mistake!" he shouted.

He tied his towel round his waist and started running madly. Prabhakaran ran behind, carrying a chain.

No! He told himself. He couldn't let that happen. He had to protect Kannan from this dreadful fate. So Nandan jumped into the river and swam towards him.

People shouted to him to stop. "What stupidity!" they said. "The elephant is obviously mad."

But Nandan didn't pay any attention to them. At that moment he didn't really care if Kannan killed him. The elephant turned and noticed Nandan trying to get near him. Quickly he started swimming for the opposite bank.

The people standing there panicked when they saw the elephant coming towards them.

Kannan climbed out of the water and rushed towards a large estate belonging to Mathai Achan, a rich farmer. Nandan and Prabhakaran ran after him. When the farmer saw the elephant swinging along towards his house, he quickly pushed his family inside and bolted all the doors.

In a cowshed on the estate, seven or eight cows and their calves were kept, tied to stakes. Kannan reached the entrance of this cowshed, and the cattle mooed loudly in fear. This puzzled Kannan. What had he done to frighten them? Perhaps they

also wanted freedom. He snapped their ropes with his trunk, and the cows scrambled out of the shed and ran helter-skelter.

Kannan pulled down all the plantain trees he could find and offered them to the cows. They were afraid at first, but soon realised that he was really a good-natured animal who would do them no harm. They nibbled at the leaves and ran around happily.

Kannan trumpeted loudly to tell the world how much he was enjoying himself. But the sound terrified the farmer and his family, who were too frightened to come out and see what was happening.

By this time, Nandan and Prabhakaran ran up, quite out of breath. The elephant took one look at them and rushed off again.

Some distance away there was a hut where a poor family lived. The man had gone to work and his wife and child were at home. Kannan walked into their courtyard. The child was just a year and a half old and was playing there.

Kannan did not notice the infant till he came very close. Two more steps and the baby would have

been crushed to death. But the elephant saw the child in time and stopped.

The mother came out of the hut, saw what was happening, and wailed in fear, "Oh! My baby!"

Kannan went back a few steps and moved off to another corner. The mother quickly picked up the child and ran inside, thanking God loudly, and praising the elephant.





The Power of Love

Kannan walked out of the courtyard and started to run down the road again. Nandan was right behind him, and after them ran Prabhakaran holding the chains. The rattling sound of the chains made Kannan run even faster.

Nandan was terribly upset and kept calling out, “Kanna my child, calm down. Please calm down!”

Kannan did not want to run away from Nandan, but he was not master of himself. A strange force made him run on and on, unmindful of the destruction he was causing.

Suddenly the elephant saw a beggar in his path. The man was lame and moved about on a wooden plank on four wheels. When he found Kannan standing in front of him, he howled in fear, “God have mercy on me! Please protect me!”

“It will take a lot of time to find a doctor to shoot the tranquilliser into him with a dart gun,” one officer said.

“You will be held responsible if he causes more damage,” said another officer.

The collector ordered that the elephant be shot.

Meanwhile, Kannan ran on. Nandan heard that a police jeep was coming soon, to put an end to Kannan. He was terrified, but he said firmly, “I won’t let anyone kill Kannan. Not the police. Not even the army. *I’ll stop them.*”

He overtook Kannan, and stood in front of him. “Kill me,” he said to the elephant. “Gore me to death first. I’ll not let anyone shoot you while I am alive.”

Kannan stopped, expecting to be beaten. But Nandan had nothing in his hands, not even a stick. He faced Kannan and said, “My beloved Kanna! I am your own Nandan. The police are coming to shoot you, but before they come, please kill me.” He moved closer and closer to the elephant.

“Don’t go near him,” shouted the crowd.

Nandan did not pay any attention. He was afraid for Kannan, not for himself. He kept imagining that he heard shots and saw the elephant

collapsing in a heap to die in great pain. "I won't let that happen," he told himself. "Either I save Kannan, or he kills me before he is shot."

Nandan went even closer to Kannan. The elephant froze. Nandan stroked his chin and ran his hands down his trunk. Then he grasped his trunk and said softly, "I am here with you Kanna. Nobody can harm you when I am here."

Kannan raised his front leg. Nandan stepped quickly onto the bent leg and sprang onto his back. The people who were looking on, shouted with joy. Kannan moved off down the road, ambling along gently. Gaining courage at the sight, Prabhakaran ran up and reached for Kannan's tusk.

A police jeep came tearing down the road and stopped. A few policemen jumped out. They were amazed at what they saw.

"Is this the mad elephant we are supposed to shoot? What nonsense! The people who complained have made a great fuss about nothing. Let's go back," said the police officer in charge, as he got back into the jeep. They drove away again.

Nandan heaved a sigh of relief. Kannan was sunk in his own thoughts.

“Men are such cowards,” he seemed to be saying to himself. “They get frightened so quickly. Can’t an elephant enjoy some freedom once in a while?”

* * *

That is the story of Kannan for you—mahout Nandan’s beloved elephant. After this, it was not surprising to find Kannan keeping watch at the hospital when Nandan was ill, was it?

Kannan’s prayers worked. Nandan recovered very soon and was discharged. He climbed onto Kannan’s back and they went off together. The hospital staff gave them a grand send off.



Chapters 1 & 2

As you read

1. Why was the elephant in the hospital?
2. Why did the doctors object to the elephant staying in the hospital? What happened finally?
3. Why did Nandan's mother not like the idea of his becoming a mahout? Was she right?
4. How did Nandan try to help the mahouts?
5. Why did Nandan tell the mahouts he was an orphan? Was it right to do this?
6. When Nandan returned to the village with the elephants, his friends were respectful to him, but they were also jealous of him. Why do you think they felt like this?

Looking at language

I went to the hospital to *look up* Kannan.

The words in italics in the above sentence have a special meaning when they combine together in this way. Such combinations are called 'phrasal verbs' and are usually made up of a verb and an adverb or a preposition.

Choose the appropriate phrasal verbs given in the box to fill in the blanks in the following sentences. You can use a dictionary if required.

look up, look at, look in, look upon, look into

1. You must the mysterious disappearance of the gulab jamuns from the kitchen yesterday, and find out what really happened.

2. Will you be able to this story I have written and make some suggestions?
3. Anil has not been around for a long time. We must him tomorrow and find out what has happened to him.
4. I'll at the school tomorrow and see if the schedule for the exams has been put up on the notice board.
5. My cousin Gita is much younger than me, but she is so good at handling the computer, that I her as an expert and do not hesitate to ask for help.

Developing your reading

An Elephant's Story is the story of a temple elephant. It is also the story of a boy who ran away from home. Can you think of any other stories of boys who ran away?

The boys in the books, *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, and *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens ran away from home too. What made these boys run away? Did they have anything in common with Nandan? Read these books and find out.

Chapters 3 & 4

As you read

1. Why was the author afraid when he heard Nandan talking to an elephant late one night?
2. Why did Nandan shout with laughter when the author told him about his fears?
3. How did Nandan have his accident?

4. How did Nandan finally become chief mahout?
5. What difficulties did he have at first while training the new elephant and how did he get over them?
6. Why did Nandan not like Kannan to take part in violent games?
7. From the way Nandan handled elephants, would you say that he was a good mahout? Give a few examples from the story.

Looking at language

Synonyms are words that are similar in meaning.

Look at the italicized words in the sentences below.

They are taken from the text. Their synonyms are given in the box. Replace the words in italics with appropriate words of the same meaning, from the box.

shut, wandered, mischievous,
affection, dangerous, exploded

1. If you treat an animal with *love* it always responds.
2. He walked to the shop, but found it was *closed*.
3. The bridge across the stream is old and *risky*.
4. Manna *roamed* all over the park looking for a tree in bloom, but did not find one.
5. The kerosene stove *burst* with a loud bang, but Veena was lucky and did not hurt herself.
6. Anand's new dog is very *naughty*. He just chewed up my new shoes.

Developing your reading

1. You are reading a story about elephants. Here are some amazing facts about elephants:

- The elephant is the only animal that can't jump.
- The elephant's brain is the largest of any land mammal.
- Most African elephants, whether male or female, have tusks. But among Asian elephants only males have tusks.
- Elephants cool themselves by fanning their ears.
- Though elephants are so big, they usually walk on tiptoe.

Which of these facts surprised you the most? Can you find out some more facts about elephants and share them with your teacher and class?

2. Kannan was a trained temple elephant. Elephants are also trained to log wood. Many years ago, elephants and horses used to take part in battle, and play games. Can you think of any other activities that animals can be trained to perform?

Make a list, and look for books that tell you the stories of such animals. *Call of the Wild* by Jack London and *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell are two such books you can read.

Chapters 5 & 6

As you read

1. How was Kannan's behaviour different from that of other temple elephants?
2. How did the people of the village treat Kannan?
3. How would Kannan behave with Nandan's mother?
4. How did Kannan save Nandan's life?

5. How did Kannan know that the snake could be harmful? Do human beings have similar instincts?
6. Who was Sivankutty? What happened to him?

Looking at language

The elephant chuckled in *enjoyment*.

Nouns can be made from verbs, by adding –er, –or, –ment, –ion, or –ation at the end of the verb as in the example given above. Sometimes the spelling of the word has to be changed because of the addition.

Look at the following sentences. Then add –er, or –or to the verb given in brackets at the end, and fill in the blanks with the verb or noun, as appropriate.

1. Thewanted to finish his work as fast as possible, but the man who wanted to the house ran out of money. (build)
2. Amar became abecause he wanted to go to exciting places in the world, but for the first year he was only able to along the west coast of India. (sail)
3. Moti bought a new, but he still could not correctlyhow much he had spent, because he had forgotten some of the things he had bought. (calculate)
4. Mohan was the of a cinema, but he took up a new job last year as he thought it might be more interesting to a restaurant. (manage)
5. Every..... wants to a book that will become a bestseller. (write)

Developing your reading

1. Compare Raman and Nandan as mahouts. Do you think their different ways of handling their elephants had anything to do with the behaviour of the animals? Can you think of any other incidents where animals have developed certain habits because of how they were treated?
2. What would you do if you found someone being cruel to an animal?

Chapter 7 & 8

As you read

1. Why did Prabhakaran join Nandan and Kannan? Did Kannan love him as much as he loved Nandan? How do you know?
2. How did Kannan behave when he first went into 'musth'?
3. Describe what Kannan did on Mathai Achan's estate. How did the cows know that Kannan was actually a good-natured animal?
4. Why were people surprised when Kannan spared the lives of the baby and the beggar?
5. Why did Nandan jump into the river? Was it a dangerous thing that he did?
6. How did Nandan save Kannan from being killed by the policemen?

Looking at language

Idioms are a group of words with a meaning that is different from the individual words that it consists of.

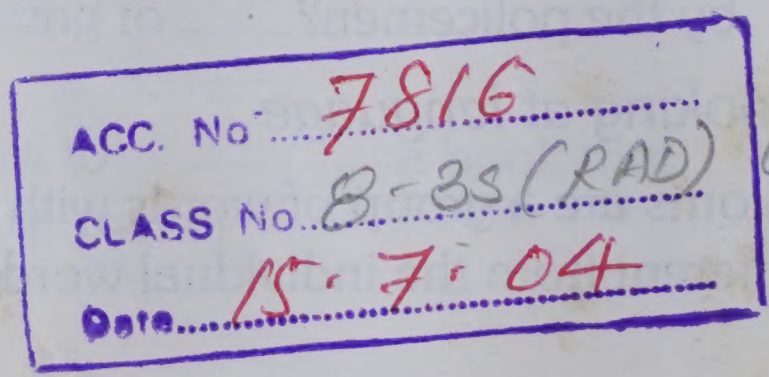
54 An Elephant's Story

The following idioms are associated with animals.
 Match the idioms in Column A with their meanings
 given in Column B. Look up a dictionary if necessary.

A	B
donkey's years	someone used by other people for their own ends
red herring	insincere sorrow
a white elephant	unreliable person
a dark horse	an over enthusiastic person
the lion's share	a life full of work and trouble
an early bird	the largest portion
a dog's life	someone who arrives early
eager beaver	a person of whom little is known
cry wolf	many years
a snake in the grass	a false trail
cat's paw	raise a false alarm
crocodile tears	an expensive but useless thing

Developing your reading

1. Which part of this story did you like most and why?
2. Out of all the animal and human characters you have come across in the book, which one did you like best? What did you like most about that character?



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